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WASHTENAW COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY – Founded December 19, 1857

WASHTENAW IMPRESSIONS

HISTORICAL HAPPENINGS AROUND THE COUNTY

Chelsea Historical Society—No meeting planned in April.

The society is compiling a picture notebook of early residents of the Chelsea area copied from original photographs. The Chelsea area includes the whole school district. Harold Jones would appreciate a call at 475-7278 from anyone having such pictures which he may borrow and copy. The originals will of course be returned.

Dexter Historical Society—7:30 p.m., Thursday, March 31, at Dexter Historical Museum. "Show and tell" program planned with members bringing family heirlooms and telling about them.

Milan Historical Society—Meets third Wednesday of month at 7:30 p.m. at the Milan Community House.

Salem Historical Society—Normally meets third Monday of month at 7:30 p.m. at Salem Town Hall. Speaker from Greenfield Village to talk about high wheel bicycles March 21.

Saline Historical Society—A dulcimer evening is planned at 8 p.m., Tuesday, April 19, in the Blue Lounge at Saline High School. Nancy J. Groce, a U-M graduate student, who is making a special study of the dulcimer, will talk about the folk music instrument. But the society also wishes to invite anyone who has a dulcimer or plays one or is interested in them to come. In fact, Dan Lirones of the society, would appreciate a call at 429-7332 if you have or play one.

Ypsilanti Historical Museum—"Growing Your Own Herbs" will be the topic of a demonstration from 2-4 p.m., Saturday, March 26. The Easter egg decorating demonstration, originally planned March 20, will be Sunday, March 27, from 2 to 4 p.m.

In honor of James Audubon's birthday, April 26 (1785), the Ypsilanti Historical Society is planning a wildlife drawing and painting contest for Ypsilanti area children in kindergarten through eighth grade. Entries will be on display Friday, April 22, through Sunday, April 24, at the museum. Prizes to be awarded include Audubon prints, Golden Nature Guides and bird coloring books.

ROOM TO SPARE

In these days when county offices are overflowing the Washtenaw County Building into various other quarters around the county, even to the hotel across the street, consider this item from a local newspaper of September 3, 1835:

DOCT. DENTON

Has removed his offices to the Court House, in the South Room on the east side of the Hall. Those who call after bedtime will please knock at the window if the door is fastened.

From the *Michigan Whig and Washtenaw Democrat* in the Rare Book Room of the U-M Graduate Library.

DAVE POLLOCK TO TALK

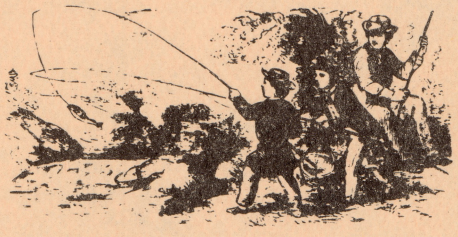
Dave Pollock, a board member and former vice president of the Washtenaw County Historical Society, will present a program at the April meeting based on his personal collection of old newspapers. It will be at 8 p.m., Thursday, April 28, in Liberty Hall.

WYSTAN STEVENS TO 'PILOT' PICTORIAL TRIP DOWN HURON AT MARCH WCHS MEETING

WCHS will start spring with a photographic trip down the Huron River, piloted by Wystan Stevens, Ann Arbor historian.

Stevens will draw on his collection of 20,000 slides for his program, "Floating Down The Huron, A Trip Through Space and Time" at 8 p.m. Thursday, March 24, in Liberty Hall at Ann Arbor Federal Savings and Loan, Liberty at Division Streets, Ann Arbor.

He plans to start at Portage Lake and follow the river as it crosses Washtenaw County to Ypsilanti.



GROUP OUTGROWS HOMES, TO MEET AT WCC IN MARCH

The Genealogy Section will continue with the second part of its series, "The Study of Genealogy," but in a new location this month.

With attendance outgrowing private homes, the group has arranged to meet in the new Learning Materials Center Building at Washtenaw Community College. The new building is next to the Exact Science Building.

The meeting will begin with a help session at 1 p.m., Sunday, March 27, followed by the meeting and program at 2:30 p.m. Mrs. Leigh C. (Alloa) Anderson will lead the discussion of how to research family history. It is open to all interested persons.

GIANT STEPS THROUGH HISTORY

WITH RALPH MUNCY

Ralph Muncy, founder of the Genealogy Section, invited his listeners at the February WCHS meeting to "tighten their seven league boots because we are going to make great strides in the next sixty minutes."

He started in 1329 in the little English village of Chew Magna, near Bristol. His slide illustrated talk ranged back and forward in time and over the map to Washtenaw County.

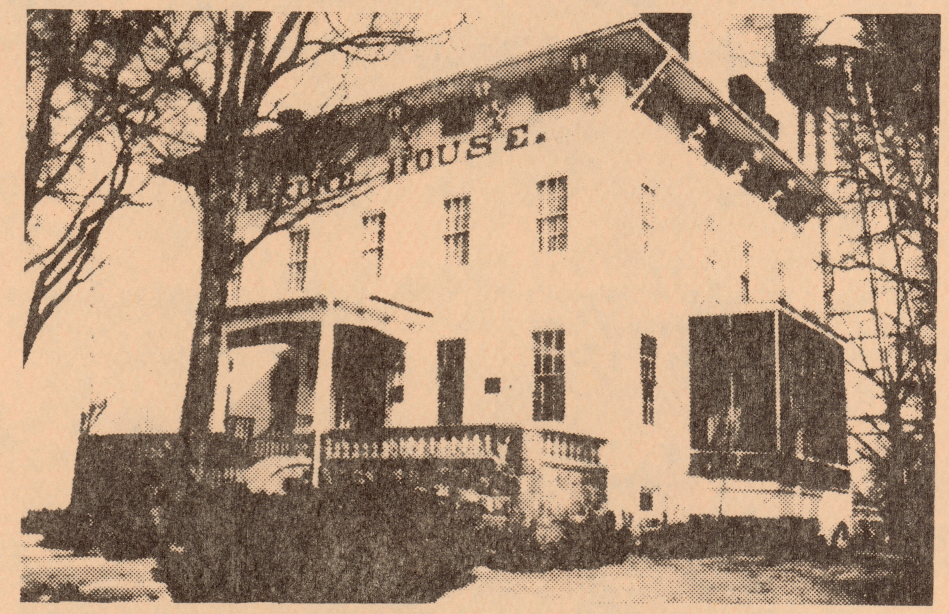
The thread that ties Chew Magna to Washtenaw County is that an early ancestor of the speaker lived there. But that was just a starting point to sketch major changes that affected not only his ancestors but also their countrymen down through the centuries.

His ancestor, Henry the coal miner, came to maturity in 1329 and lived in the village of Chew Magna.

Three hundred years later, Henry's descendant, Thomas Miner, migrated to New England. He was an initial member of the settlement at Charlestown (now part of Boston), a year before the main Winthrop fleet came in 1630.

Thomas Miner's descendant, Abigail Miner, was a sort of female Paul Revere who, during the Revolution, warned the people around New London, Connecticut that the British were coming. She married Elisha Congdon. Their sons, Elisha II and James, came to Michigan and founded Chelsea. Abigail came too and is buried in Oak Grove Cemetery at Chelsea. Elisha II was the speaker's great-great grandfather.

Now let us return to Chew. Probably Henry the miner knew very little more about his ancestors than he did about the descendants to come, Muncy said. And yet, 3,500 years before his time, there were people in England, apparently from eastern Europe, who built Stonehenge and quite a few similar stone circles scattered around England. There were others at Carnac in Brittany but most fascinating of all, American colonists found similar stone arrangements in New England. Scholars are still considering their meaning but scientific dating shows the New England monuments date from about the same time as Stonehenge.



Courtesy of Harold Jones

McKune House, now Chelsea Public Library, was built by Elisha Congdon II, a founder of Chelsea and ancestor of the speaker, Ralph Muncy. After the McKune's bought it, it was operated as a hotel.

The Romans conquered England about 1,400 years before Henry the miner but they had difficulty with the native Britons in Wales and Picts in Scotland. Today we can still find the old Roman wall almost on the English-Scottish boundary that was built to prevent the Picts from ravaging England.

Roman failure to conquer Wales and Scotland affected European history for years to come because Scotland was frequently allied with France in wars with England before the two were united under the same king.

About 1,000 years before Henry the miner, the Picts invaded below the wall and Constantius, one of the Augusti of Rome, and his son, Constantine, came to put down the invasion. The father was killed. The son ultimately became Caesar of Rome. While contesting for control of Rome he claimed to have seen a flaming cross in the sky and was converted to Christianity.

Up to then Christians had been a very humble people who had suffered at Roman hands. Now Constantine decided to name himself head of the Christian Church and thus began Catholicism.

Constantine moved his seat of government east to Constantinople, named after him. The Romans finally withdrew from England. But shortly after, priests, nuns and lay clergy began infiltrating England. One, a monk named Bede, wrote a history of England up to then, in Latin, to which we are indebted for what little we know of England prior to that.

Next Angles, Saxons and Jutes invaded. Then Danes came about the eighth century. The Danes occupied the low country north and east of the old Roman road

across England from London to Chester while the Angles and Saxons persisted to the south and west. Even though the groups later intermingled, that road is still sort of a demarcation line today. The English call it Watling Street.

As the nobles and barons accumulated wealth out of the exactions they made from serfs, trade began to develop with the Orient and banking developed in Venice and the Hanseatic League area on the Baltic Sea, he said.

Next, William the Conqueror invaded England, not uninvited as the history books may have led you to believe, he said. King Edgar had been educated in Normandy and was a cousin of William. William had good reason to believe he had a right to come into England and take it over.

Under the Normans, the king and barons took over land ownership. They had to have exactions to finance their affairs so a great study was made of all the holdings known as the Domesday or Doomsday Book.

From then on there was constant conflict between the crown and the landed and clerical barons over the wealth extracted from the people. Finally the king had to make concessions to the nobles to get more money for his occupations and wars.

As the land was divided between the barons' children it was harder to gather funds so a law of primogeniture was established. That meant the oldest son inherited the land and title. The other children then had to get out and mingle with the serfs. That had a leavening influence, he said.

Feared disruption of trade routes and invasion of Rome by the Moslems, who were gaining ascendancy in the Middle East, led to the Crusades. The Pope enlisted returning Crusaders in a crusade against the non-orthodox but prosperous Albigenses of southwestern France. A slaughter occurred which in proportion to the number of people far exceeded the slaughter by Nazis in World War II.

Meanwhile, resentment came up against Jewish people who had migrated into England and become financiers. Under Edward I a law to expel them was passed. Also under him, civil courts were established to placate rising discontent with crown courts. Before then all legal matters were handled by Crown-appointed sheriffs.

Oxford University was already established and Cambridge developed during the reign of Edward I.

In Popish times the church exacted tithes from serfs and peasants, he said. They didn't have money, so tithing barns were set up where they brought their chickens and livestock. Today many of those tithing barns have been refurbished as community halls, modern inside but retaining their exterior as it was in the Middle Ages.

Henry the miner was living when King Edward III embarked on the Hundred Years War to protect English claims in France. This was the time too that plagues depleted the population in England and Europe.

During a lull in the war English became the official court language and schools were established for the lower segments of society in which English was taught. The church tower in Chew Magna is an example of the English Perpendicular style of architecture which developed then. Henry the miner was alive just before it was built, he noted. It was completed in his grandson's time.

Incidentally, Edward III knighted Henry the miner who became Sir Henry Miner. We don't know the circumstances, he said.

Noting that the Chew Magna church was famous for its bells, Muncy played a bit of bell ringing which he taped on a visit there.

After Wycliffe translated the Bible into English, Lollardy, a popular movement in opposition to the established church arose. People were becoming aware of the writings of ancient Greece too.

After the One Hundred Years War two groups of the royal family fought for the crown in the War of the Roses before the Tudor reign was established.

Interest in trade and navigation grew in the fifteenth century. The Portuguese were sailing around the coast of Africa; Columbus crossed the Atlantic; and, not to be outdone, John Cabot sailed from Bristol in 1497 to find the Northwest Passage. He failed but no doubt his expedition gave people there a wider knowledge of the world, probably including Henry Miner's descendants.

Henry VIII came to the throne when the Protestant Reformation was sweeping Europe and began to sweep England. Wanting money and personal power, he first tried to gain favor with the Pope who called him "Defender of the Faith" for criticizing Luther. Later he took over Papal authority in England, thus founding the Church of England.

His daughter, Queen Mary, raised a Catholic, restored power to the Pope, but when Elizabeth became the Virgin Queen the situation was reversed.

It wasn't just religious restrictions that brought the Pilgrims and Puritans to America, Muncy said. It was also because the crown, with both church and secular authority, was creating exactions on all elements of society and they were rebelling.

Thomas Miner landed in Salem in June, 1629, and moved to Charlestown. Before Winthrop established a theocracy in Massachusetts which required that all males be church members in order to vote, Miner with 18 other men and 11 women organized a Congregational Church. That may be a measure of his independence, he said. In 1634 he did join Winthrop's church in order to have political rights.

In 1642 he moved to New London for ten years before finally going a few miles east to Stonington. His daughter married an Avery and their house in Norwich, Connecticut is still standing.

The English-French wars were reflected in the colonies as French Canadians, aided by Indians, drifted down the valleys of the Hudson and Connecticut Rivers and created havoc. During Queen Anne's War, about 1708, French sailors even came into the ports of Stonington and New London and took captives. These things helped establish the independent attitudes of the colonists, reflected in the American Revolution.

Descendants of Thomas Miner participated in the Revolution. Thomas, son of Ebenezer, was commanding officer at the port of New London when the British captured and destroyed it. He was killed in the slaughter at the fort.

While the British fleet was approaching, Thomas's sister, Abigail, rode horseback through the countryside to enlist help but unfortunately the help arrived too late to save New London.

Abigail married Elisha Congdon and lived in Norwich, Connecticut. Their home, in which they operated a tavern for a time, is still standing. Elisha was killed in the fall of a building. There were eight children.

The Miners were mostly weavers or merchants or craftsmen. The textile mills came after 1800 and weavers began to lose their jobs. Not wanting to be wage workers was one of the reasons Elisha Congdon II and his brother, James, migrated to Michigan in 1834 and settled at what became Chelsea.

Elisha, great-great grandfather of the speaker, was one of the delegates to the "Frost-bitten Convention" in Ann Arbor in December 1836 which agreed to the provisions Congress set up by which Michigan could become a state.

The second home Elisha built in Chelsea was sold to the McKunes and is now the Public Library there.

In 1966, 130 years after the "Frost-bitten Convention," a commemorative plaque was dedicated at the convention site, now the Washtenaw County Building in Ann Arbor. Descendants of the delegates participated including the speaker's granddaughter.

When Michigan became a state, it was more than half wilderness, he noted. By the time the plaque was dedicated the whole country had become industrialized. We have an industrialized society in which a few industrial barons wield a power which would have been the envy of all the agricultural barons of Europe under the kings, he commented.

Even before the "Frost-bitten Convention" some of those who had helped write the Constitution were already concerned as to whether the provisions of the Constitution were adequate for the anticipated transition from an agricultural to an industrial society.

Before 1830, James Madison was asked what he foresaw. He said, "We are free today substantially, but the day will come when our republic will be an impossibility. It will be an impossibility because the wealth of the country will be concentrated in the hands of a few."

Madison also pondered the effect of industrialization on freedom of the press, he continued. And we know today there are a great many discussions going on about whether our constitution is adequate to preserve freedom of the press in view of the oligarchy in radio, television and other institutions, he concluded.

ZONTA SALE HELP NEEDED

Zonta Club will again donate to WCHS for every hour society members help with their annual rummage sale Thursday to Saturday, March 24-26. Both men and women are needed to help set up on Thursday afternoon and sell the other two days, especially Friday. If you can help for an hour or more, please call Ethelyn Morton, 662-2634.

Washtenaw
Historical Society
Meeting
THURSDAY
8:00 P.M.
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ANN ARBOR FEDERAL SAVINGS
LIBERTY AT DIVISION
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